From the Question of Existence to the Conditions of Determination:

Reconstructing "Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?" in MARP

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Abstract

This paper argues that the classical formulation of the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" rests on a false symmetry between "something" and "nothing." In its standard metaphysical form, the question treats both terms as if they were equally available explanatory alternatives and then asks why one obtains rather than the other. Against this framing, I develop a reconstruction of the problem from within MARP (Metaphysics of the Absolute and Reference Points). On this view, judgment does not begin from an absolute standpoint but from a point of reference: a structured condition under which differentiation, attribution, and intelligibility become possible. What appears as certainty, stability, or presence is therefore not evidence of an unconditioned absolute, but the effect of highly stabilized referential configurations. On this basis, unity is reinterpreted not as an ontological primitive but as an operational consequence of determination, while determination itself is understood not as an object before judgment but as the condition of possibility of judgment. The central claim is that "nothing" fails to qualify as a genuine explanatory alternative to "something," because it lacks the conditions of determination, reference, and inferential support required for comparison. The question of existence must therefore be reformulated: not why being was selected over nothingness, but how determination becomes possible such that something can appear at all.

Keywords MARP; determination; point of reference; nothingness; metaphysics; unity; epistemic stability

1. Introduction

The question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is standardly presented as if "something" and "nothing" were equally available explanatory alternatives. On that framing, philosophy is asked to explain why one obtains rather than the other. Yet this framing already presupposes more than it establishes. It grants "nothing" a standing within the comparison that has not yet been justified, and it treats judgment as if it could be formulated independently of the conditions that make such a comparison possible in the first place.

This paper argues, from the standpoint of MARP, that the question must be reconstructed at a prior level. The issue is not which of two symmetrical metaphysical options is to be preferred, but under what conditions something becomes available as determinable at all. This requires relocating judgment from an allegedly absolute standpoint to what I call a point of reference: the structured condition under which differentiation, attribution, and intelligibility become possible.

By a point of reference, I do not mean a merely private perspective, a purely linguistic convention, or a disguised return to an absolute ground. I mean the structured condition under which differentiation becomes possible, attribution becomes admissible, and judgment acquires intelligible content. A point of reference is thus not what frees judgment from conditions, but what makes judgment possible under conditions in the first place.

This proposal can be situated against three influential philosophical backgrounds. In Leibniz, the question is tied to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and to the demand for an adequate explanation of why there is something rather than nothing (Leibniz 1989; Pruss 2006). In Heidegger, the question is radicalized into an ontological problem concerning beings as such in relation to nothingness (Heidegger 1998). In Parmenidean thought, by contrast, non-being is excluded at a more basic level, insofar as it cannot function as a stable route for thought and discourse (Palmer 2009). MARP does not simply adopt any of these positions. Rather, it shifts the issue from the comparison between two allegedly symmetrical terms to the conditions under which something can become determined in the first place, and under which "nothing" fails to qualify as a symmetrical explanatory counterpart.

MARP does not simply repeat Heidegger's displacement of the metaphysical question. Heidegger radicalizes the issue by thematizing beings and nothingness at the ontological level, whereas MARP shifts the explanatory burden to the conditions of determination under which something becomes available at all. The disagreement is therefore not merely over the significance of nothingness, but over whether "nothing" can function as a symmetrical explanatory alternative within the inherited formulation of the question.

The argument proceeds as follows. I begin by distinguishing MARP's referential account of judgment from the classical tendency to treat the outcome of judgment as detachable from its enabling conditions. I then reinterpret certainty, stability, and presence as effects of referential stabilization rather than disclosures of an unconditioned ground. On that basis, I develop the

claim that unity is an operational consequence of determination rather than an ontological primitive. I then turn to determination itself as the condition of possibility of judgment. Finally, I argue that "nothing" fails to function as a genuine explanatory alternative to "something," and that the question of existence must therefore be reformulated accordingly.

2. Judgment and the Point of Reference

A recurring feature of classical metaphysical thought is the tendency to treat the outcome of judgment as if, once justified, it became independent of the conditions that produced it. Whether the conclusion is affirmative, negative, or suspensive, it is often taken to possess a self-standing validity, as though the completed judgment could be referred to an absolute standpoint. This tendency is visible not only in foundationalist or rationalist metaphysics, but also in forms of skepticism that universalize doubt and thereby install it as a comprehensive principle governing further judgments.

By a point of reference, I do not mean a merely private perspective, a purely linguistic convention, or a disguised substitute for the absolute. I mean the structured condition under which differentiation becomes possible, attribution becomes admissible, and judgment begins to bear intelligible content. A point of reference is therefore neither a subjective viewpoint in the thin sense nor an unconditioned metaphysical ground. It is the enabling locus within which something can appear as discriminable, bearable, and available for judgment.

The point of reference should not be classified too quickly as merely subjective, merely epistemic, or simply ontological in a traditional sense. It names the enabling condition under which a difference becomes bearable enough for attribution and judgment. In that sense, it operates structurally rather than merely psychologically, and conditionally rather than absolutely.

This distinction matters because MARP is easily misunderstood at precisely this point. The point of reference is not introduced in order to replace one absolute with another under a different name. On the contrary, it is introduced in order to block the very move by which conditioned outcomes are redescribed as if they had become unconditioned. A judgment remains tied to the referential structure that renders it possible; its legitimacy lies not in escaping that structure, but in remaining accountable to it.

Judgment, on this account, is best understood as a referential outcome. It is not a self-standing disclosure of reality from nowhere, but the product of a structure that makes differentiation and attribution possible. What classical philosophy often calls final objectivity is, from this perspective, frequently the result of suppressing the referential conditions that made the judgment possible in the first place.

The problem, then, is not only that many philosophical systems reach questionable conclusions. More fundamentally, they tend to redescribe conditioned results as if those results had acquired a self-standing status. MARP resists precisely this transition. It does not deny validity, objectivity, or judgment; it relocates them. On this account, objectivity is not independence from reference, but disciplined accountability to the conditions that render judgment intelligible, sustainable, and criticisable.

3. Certainty, Stability, and the Operational Emergence of Unity

Once judgment is relocated within referential conditions, certainty, stability, and presence must also be reinterpreted. In more traditional frameworks, these notions are often taken to indicate proximity to an absolute, or at least to a layer of reality whose authority no longer depends on the conditions of its disclosure. MARP rejects that inference. What appears as certainty is better understood as the effect of a highly stabilized referential configuration.

When a point of reference reaches a high degree of stabilization, introducing a significantly different degree of doubt becomes structurally costly. The issue is not merely that the judgment feels compelling. Too much variation threatens the collapse of the framework that sustains the judgment in the first place. Certainty, on this view, is not the suspension of conditions but the highest degree of their stabilization.

The same holds for what may be described as presence. Presence is not evidence that an unconditioned absolute has been reached. It marks the relative resistance of what appears to displacement within a sufficiently stabilized structure of reference. What is present is what can be borne stably enough to support intelligibility and continued attribution.

This reinterpretation bears directly on unity. Unity should not be treated here as an ontological primitive existing prior to determination. It is better understood as an operational consequence of successful determination. To say “this is one” is not simply to attach a detachable

predicate; it is to enact a determination through which something is held within a boundary capable of bearing attribution.

For that reason, doubt about the unity of what is already determined must be distinguished from doubt at the level of interpretation. One may still dispute whether an event should be referred to a single agent, a plurality of agents, or a layered structure. But that is different from doubting the unity of what is already determined as determined. The former concerns competing attributions; the latter threatens the very act of determination by which something is held in view at all.

Unity, then, is not an ontological absolute preceding determination. It is the operational effect of a difference that has been stabilized sufficiently to bear itself.

4. Determination as the Condition of Possibility of Judgment

The central concept of this paper is determination. In MARP, determination is neither a ready-made object placed before judgment nor a merely secondary conceptual imposition upon what is already fully given. Nor is it a function artificially posited in order to solve a prior metaphysical problem. Rather, determination names the structural condition under which something can emerge as differentiable, bearable, and judgeable at all.

Determination should therefore not be classified too quickly as merely epistemic, merely ontological, or merely transcendental in the narrow sense. It operates across these distinctions by naming the condition under which a difference becomes sufficiently stabilized to support attribution and intelligibility. In that sense, it is not a later property of what appears, but a condition of appearance as something available for judgment.

The underlying sequence is straightforward. Judgment presupposes difference. Difference presupposes reference. Reference presupposes a degree of stabilization sufficient for something to be held, distinguished, and carried through inference. Determination is therefore not the product of judgment, but the condition that allows an object of judgment to appear in the first place. Judgment does not bestow determination upon its object; it operates only because some degree of determination is already at work.

This has important metaphysical implications. Existence is not best understood here as a self-enclosed substance fully determinate in advance of all manifestation. It is better understood

as a field of differentiation within which determinate formations become possible. Determination is not an external addition to being, nor the product of an independent rational order imposed upon it. It is one of the structural features through which existence becomes capable of appearing as something that can be borne, distinguished, and judged.

This also clarifies the status of truth within the present framework. Truth is not secured by escaping determination, but by remaining accountable to the structure that makes determination possible. What is true is not what stands beyond all conditions, but what can be sustained, borne, and critically assessed within a stabilized field of differentiation.

Truth is therefore not secured by abstraction away from determination, nor by reducing what appears to a simpler hidden ground. It is better understood as the disciplined persistence of what can be sustained within the conditions that make determination possible. Truth, on this view, is not what escapes determination, but what remains accountable to its enabling structure.

A brief test case is provided by indeterminacy. On the present account, indeterminacy should not be understood as the simple absence of being, but as a case in which referential stabilization has not reached the threshold required for decisive determination. What is vague is not therefore unreal; rather, it is insufficiently stabilized to sustain fully determinate attribution. This supports the broader claim that determination is not an optional addition to what is already given, but a condition of appearance as judgeable at all.

5. Why "Nothing" Is Not a Symmetrical Explanatory Alternative

The central claim of this paper is that the classical formulation of the question appears to presuppose a questionable symmetry between "something" and "nothing." The claim is not that "nothing" is meaningless in every possible context. Nor is it that the term has no legitimate negative or heuristic use. The claim is narrower and stronger at once: in the metaphysical question under consideration, "nothing" fails to function as a symmetrical explanatory alternative to "something" (Sorensen 2015).

One might object that "nothing" need not be determinate in the same way as "something" in order to serve as a contrast term. But this misses the specific target of the present argument. The issue is not whether "nothing" differs from "something." The issue is whether the classical formulation of the question presupposes a comparison whose explanatory force depends upon

both terms being available within a common space of intelligibility. MARP denies that “nothing” satisfies that condition.

A further objection might be that the present argument covertly privileges “something” from the outset and simply excludes “nothing” by definitional fiat. If so, the alleged asymmetry would be trivial rather than philosophically informative. But this objection misidentifies the structure of the claim. MARP does not begin by awarding priority to “something” as a metaphysical winner. It argues instead that only what enters conditions of determination can count as available for explanatory comparison in the first place. The issue is not preference for one term over another, but the prior conditions under which a term can function within the comparison at all.

“Something” is not merely a lexical placeholder for whatever happens to exist. It names what appears where determination becomes possible. It belongs, therefore, to a structure involving differentiation, reference, stabilization, and inferential continuation. “Nothing,” by contrast, furnishes no point of reference, sustains no determinate contrast from within itself, and provides no inferential carry-over adequate to the explanatory role assigned to it by the classical question. In that sense, it does not qualify as a genuine alternative of the same order.

This does not mean that the term “nothing” cannot be used negatively, contrastively, or analytically in other settings. It means, more specifically, that in the metaphysical setting presupposed by the inherited question, it does not rise to the level of a symmetrical explanatory counterpart. To function as such, it would need to satisfy the minimal conditions required for entry into the comparison. It would need to be available under conditions of determination sufficient for referential and inferential use. It is precisely this requirement that it fails to meet.

The question must therefore be reformulated. The issue is not why being was selected over nothingness, as though both stood before metaphysics as equiprimordial options. The more basic issue is how determination becomes possible such that something can appear at all. Once the problem is posed at this level, the explanatory burden changes. One no longer seeks a preference relation between two allegedly symmetrical terms; one asks instead under what conditions anything becomes available for judgment, attribution, and ontological bearing in the first place.

Existence, then, is not the victory of something over nothing. It is the emergence of what can be determined. “Nothing” fails not because it has been causally defeated, but because it does not

satisfy the very conditions required to function as the kind of alternative the classical question presupposes.

6. Conclusion

The upshot of the present argument is not that existence requires a new absolute explanation, nor merely that "nothing" has been disqualified as a competing metaphysical hypothesis. The deeper claim is that the traditional question conceals a prior error: it presupposes a symmetry that determination does not support. If judgment begins from a point of reference rather than an absolute standpoint, and if something appears only under conditions of determination, then "nothing" cannot function as a symmetrical explanatory alternative to "something."

The question of existence must therefore be reconstructed. What requires philosophical clarification is not why something won out over nothing, but how determination becomes possible such that something can appear, be borne, and become judgeable at all.

If successful, this reconstruction changes the debate by relocating the explanatory burden from a contrast between being and nothingness to the structural conditions under which determinacy, intelligibility, and judgment become possible. Its significance lies not in adding one more answer to an inherited metaphysical question, but in altering the level at which the question itself ought to be posed.

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